

News Release

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New publication helps support school mental health

MADISON — Mental health issues impact the lives and learning of an estimated one in five students in Wisconsin and across the nation. To guide state schools in implementing a comprehensive system to deliver and coordinate school mental health services, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction recently published “The Wisconsin School Mental Health Framework.”

“Our students’ social-emotional development, mental health, and academic achievement are interconnected,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “The new ‘Wisconsin School Mental Health Framework’ provides guidance on how teachers and schools can create partnerships with students, families, and community providers to reduce the barriers to learning that can accompany mental health issues and create a school environment that benefits all students.”

In Wisconsin, the average classroom has at least five children with serious mental health issues, one struggling with severe abuse, and 10 living in poverty: stressors and traumas that can impair a student’s ability to learn. The “Wisconsin School Mental Health Framework” addresses all aspects of social-emotional development of school-age children, including wellness, mental illness, substance abuse, and the effects of adverse childhood experiences. It includes strategies for removing the stigma associated with mental illness and offers a continuum of supports as part of an integrated system for school mental health services.

The framework guides school staff in addressing mental health issues across three levels that promote relationships, engagement, and learning. The broadest level is for all students. The framework stresses relationship building, resiliency, and rich social-emotional learning that incorporates mental health and wellness education. For students who struggle with mental health issues, the second level of the framework provides guidance for early identification, screening, and co-planning strategies with families and community providers. The third level is for the few students who have intensive needs. The framework lays out ongoing counseling and support, safety and re-entry plans, referral and follow-up procedures as well as deepened collaboration with youth, families, and community providers.

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The framework is designed to easily integrate into existing multilevel systems of support widely used across the state. Key elements include collaboration with community mental health providers, co-planning with families, and creating a school improvement initiative that focus on wellness and mental health. Eight of the 10 foundational principals for the framework are fundamental Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) components identified by the Wisconsin PBIS Network.

“By placing mental health initiatives into an overall school improvement process, our teachers, administrators, and school staff members can create a learning environment where students are more engaged and teachers can focus on classroom instruction,” Evers noted. “The goal is to meet the needs of all students so they graduate college and career ready.”

Every Wisconsin public school district received a copy of the “Wisconsin School Mental Health Framework.” The framework and coordinating needs assessment documents are available online at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health>. For paper copies of the publication, contact Mark Freudenberg, (608) 267-9239, mark.freudenberg@dpi.wi.gov.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2016_38.pdf.